

**ABERDEENSHIRE  
COUNCIL**

**GYPSY/ TRAVELLER  
STOPOVER SITE  
DEVELOPMENT  
GUIDANCE**

**June 2013**

## INTRODUCTION

Aberdeenshire Council's Housing & Social Work Service aims to set standards of achieving equality in all areas of housing and across all communities, including the Gypsy/ Traveller community.

Gypsies/Travellers have been in Scotland for many centuries and still retain their own cultures and customs. The term 'Gypsy/Traveller' refers to distinct groups - such as Romany Gypsies, Scottish and Irish Travellers - who regard the travelling lifestyle as being part of their ethnic identity. There are also other types of Traveller, such as Occupational Travellers, Show-people and New Age Travellers: distinct groups who do not regard themselves as Gypsies/Travellers and do not receive protection under equalities legislation. In Scotland today many Gypsies/Travellers live on authorised council sites, while others live on private sites or roadside encampments. Aberdeenshire Council is committed to promoting equality and recognises and accepts the Gypsy/Travellers' right to a nomadic way of life.

The legal recognition of Scottish Gypsies/Travellers as an ethnic group is reserved to Westminster. However, the Scottish Government continues to recognise Gypsies/Travellers as an ethnic group in its work and encourages others to do likewise. A recent judgement in relation to an employment tribunal (K. MacLennan Vs Gypsy Traveller Education and Information Project) has set a precedent in this regard, it concluded that "*Scottish Gypsy/Travellers*" is a group which can be defined by reference to its ethnic origins and therefore can be afforded the protection offered by section 2(1)(d) of the Race Relations Act 1976. (Scottish Government, 2010).

Article 25.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the right to adequate housing as integral to the right to an adequate standard of living. Housing rights are enshrined in international treaties signed and ratified by the UK and therefore applicable in Scotland, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified in 1976).

This guidance is primarily intended to cover site provision for Gypsies/ Travellers travelling through Aberdeenshire who require authorised temporary stopping places i.e. **Stopover Sites**.

## **GYPSY/ TRAVELLER STOPOVER SITE**

Aberdeenshire Council defines a Gypsy/ Traveller **Stopover Site** as 'An authorised area of land with basic facilities which can be accessed by Gypsies/ Travellers on a temporary basis'.

The requirement for stopover sites reflect the fact that the site will only be used for a proportion of the year and that individual families will normally only stay on the site for a few days or weeks.

**The guidance is NOT appropriate for all Gypsy/ Traveller sites such as Fully Serviced Sites or Transit Sites which have access to amenity blocks and electricity.**

### **1 THE SITE**

#### **Site Location**

Selecting the right location for a site is a key element in supporting good community relations and maximising its success.

Consultation with Gypsies/ Travellers suggest that most would prefer to be within a 2-3 mile radius of basic facilities such as doctors' surgeries, schools and shops. Aberdeenshire Council's Local Development Plan (LDP) Policy makes reference to 'conveniently accessible location' and 3 miles is deemed to be the absolute extent of this distance.

It is essential to ensure that the location of a site will provide a safe environment for the residents. Gypsy/ Traveller sites should meet all the needs of a general housing site. Thus all prospective site locations should be considered carefully before any decision is taken to proceed to ensure that the health and safety of prospective residents is not at risk. It should also provide visual and acoustic privacy and have characteristics which are sympathetic to the local environment. As for general needs housing, issues of impact on the character and amenity of the area, sufficient access to the public road network, conservation biodiversity, avoidance of areas at risk from flooding etc. will need to be considered. The proposed stopover site must be relatively flat and suitable for purpose.

The site must be sustainable, offering scope to manage an integrated coexistence with the local community. This will include consideration of noise and possible disturbance to Gypsies/ Travellers living on the site and possible noise and disturbance to the wider community in particular from movement of vehicles.

#### **Health & Safety**

Sites should not be situated near refuse sites, industrial processors or other hazardous places as this will obviously have a detrimental effect on the

general health and well-being of the residents and pose particular safety risks for young children.

Stopover sites must not be located on contaminated land. Only where land has been properly decontaminated should development be considered on that land. Remedial work should only be undertaken by approved contractors in accordance with relevant standards to ensure the contamination has been remedied to the standard on which housing development would take place. These processes can be prohibitively expensive and should be considered only where it is financially viable from the outset.

Stopover sites adjacent to a rubbish tip, on landfill sites, close to electricity pylons or any heavy industry are unlikely to be suitable. When considering sites adjacent to main roads, flyovers and railway lines careful regard must be given to:

- The health and safety of children and others who will live on the site; and
- The greater noise transference through the walls of caravans than through the walls of conventional housing.

Sites should not be developed on exposed sloping sites where there is risk of caravans being overturned.

## **2 SITE DESIGN**

### **Site Layout**

When designing the layout of a site careful consideration must be given to the health and safety of residents and in particular children. The need for separate vehicular and pedestrian access should also be considered.

It is important to ensure that traffic calming measures are implemented for all sites where possible. Care should be taken when introducing speed humps and other measures to ensure that appropriate drainage is accommodated within the scheme to allow for the effective passage of surplus water.

Entry and exit points to a site should be deemed safe and benefit from good visibility splays to the satisfaction of the Roads Authority.

Clear and effective signage should be introduced and careful consideration should be taken of the need for where a speed restriction or other traffic calming measure.

Evidence has shown from the layout of unauthorised encampments, many Gypsies/ Travellers prefer to locate their pitches in a circular or horseshoe design rather than the traditional linear layout of pitches. Consultation with the Gypsy/ Traveller community is crucial in deciding how best to proceed with the overall layout of the site and how to get full value from the investment in it. It is a key element in obtaining the trust and full support of the prospective residents at the outset of the project and can help deal swiftly with subsequent consultation on individual aspects of the design as they arise.

Craigforth (2009) research, recommended stopover sites accommodate 6-8 pitches based on the volume of Gypsies/ Traveller travelling through Aberdeenshire at that time. However, since 2009 Aberdeenshire has experienced slightly larger groups of Gypsies/ Travellers coming into the area. Therefore stopover sites should ideally range in size from 6-8 pitches to larger sites accommodating up to 15 pitches.

### **Site Boundaries**

Site boundaries should take into account adjoining land uses and be designed for the safety and protection of children. Where an existing site may be located near an industrial area or process or a main road, fencing and planting should be used to screen out unpleasant characteristics and improve the amenity of the site. A range of different boundaries may be used including bunding and planting, fences, low walls, hedges and natural features. The aim should be to achieve a boundary that is sympathetic to and in keeping with the surrounding area. Boundaries can also be used to provide shelter for more exposed sites.

### **Size of Pitch**

There is no one-size-fits-all measurement of a pitch as, in the case of the settled community, this depends on the size of individual families and their particular needs. However, Aberdeenshire Council recommends stopover pitch sizes in the region of 15x8.5m to accommodate a touring caravan and the towing vehicle.

### **Layout of Pitches**

Each pitch should be clearly demarcated to make it clear what each individual household may occupy. The aim should be to achieve a boundary that is clear, sympathetic to, and in keeping with, surrounding areas.

### **Orientation of Pitches**

In designing the layout of a stopover site enough space must be provided to permit the easy manoeuvrability of the residents own living accommodation both to the site and subsequently on to a pitch.

Access roads and the site design should provide sufficient space for the manoeuvrability of caravans and their towing vehicles.

### **Access for Emergency Vehicles**

It is essential consultation with local fire and rescue service officers take place at a very early stage of designing a stopover site.

In designing a stopover site, all routes for vehicles on the site must allow easy access for emergency vehicles and safe places for turning.

## **Site Security**

Site layout can play an important role in avoiding a sense of enclosure and isolation amongst Gypsies/ Travellers. The aim should be to 'design out' crime and social exclusion and 'design in' community safety and social inclusion through openness of design, allowing ease in passing through whether walking or driving. A gated entrance may be appropriate on some sites to ensure the safety of children.

Site layout should maximise natural surveillance enabling residents to easily oversee all areas of the site. Scheme specific advice on security provision for the site should be obtained from Police Scotland for the area and reference should be made to 'Secure by Design' standards to inform detailed planning of the site.

## **Hard Standing**

Each pitch must include a hard standing area constructed of suitable hard wearing material which extends over the whole area to be occupied by a touring caravan or other vehicle. These standings must be permeable and constructed in accordance with the industry code of practice and project a sufficient distance outwards to enable occupants to enter and leave safely. The base must be sufficient to bear the load placed on it by the home or vehicle and its contents, and the anticipated level of vehicle movement. Hard-standing should be part of the landscape design.

## **3 SITE FACILITIES**

### **Water Supply**

It is essential for at least one cold water supply to be provided for the whole site. This may be by means of water standpipe or water bowser.

### **Toilet Facilities**

Portable toilets must be provided for the use of residents and there must be at least one portable toilet for every household on the site.

### **Refuse Facilities**

Refuse disposal facilities should be provided for every household.

## **4 CONSULTATION**

Consultation on any proposal for a new Gypsy/ Traveller stopover site should include consultation with:

- Gypsies/ Travellers
- The local community (including both residents near to the site and the Community Council)
- Aberdeenshire Council's Housing & Social Work Service

- Aberdeenshire Council's Planning & Buildings Standards Service
- Aberdeenshire Council Infrastructure Services
- Aberdeenshire Council's Gypsy/ Traveller Officer Group
- Scottish Fire & Rescue Service
- Police Scotland
- NHS Grampian

Elected members should be made aware of the proposals at an early stage and provided with sufficient information to enable them to engage with any community concerns.

The needs and preferences of those who will access the stopover site should be given full consideration and should be met as far as is possible within available resources.

### **Consulting with the Travelling Community**

Gypsies/ Travellers and/or their relevant representative bodies should be consulted throughout all stages of the design process, including site identification through the local council.

Aberdeenshire Council has a Service Level Agreement with Grampian Regional Equality Council and through this agreement employ a dedicated Gypsy/ Traveller Liaison Worker (GTLW) who consults with the Gypsy/ Traveller community on a regular basis.

The assistance of the GTLW should be considered when consulting the Travelling community with plans of any new stopover site in Aberdeenshire.

There are low levels of literacy in some sections of the Travelling community. It is important therefore that consultation does not rely on written methods such as leaflets, surveys or feedback forms. Face to face consultation which enables Gypsies/ Travellers to influence rather than just respond to the consultation agenda is important. Provision of models and computer generated images of proposed site development will also help prospective residents visualise the outcome and help identify useful refinements which may not otherwise be immediately apparent.

### **Consulting with the settled community**

As for all kinds of development, it is important that members of the local community, whether Gypsies/ Travellers or settled residents, are able to feed in views on plans for new stopover sites.

Members of the settled community should have the opportunity to comment on any new proposed stopover site in Aberdeenshire. Public meetings have been found to be a good way of disseminating information relating to proposals. Petitions, while useful, can be biased towards a particular outcome in the question asked and do not substitute for personal comment via the formal planning application as part of the statutory planning process.

## **Feeding back on the results of consultation**

It will not always be possible to meet the needs and preferences of everyone and, if the reasons for this are explained clearly, this will normally be understood by participants. As a common courtesy, and in line with the Standards for community engagement to which the Council has committed, the results of any consultation should always be fed back to the individuals and communities concerned. Where it has not been possible to meet the expressed preferences of the community the reasons for this should be clearly explained.

## **Further Information**

Aberdeenshire Council, 2009, *Accommodation needs assessment of Gypsies/ Travellers in Grampian*. Available at:

<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/privatehousing/CRAIGFORTHACCOMMODATIONNEEDSASSESSMENTExecutiveSummaryversion2LB.pdf>

Aberdeenshire Council, 2012, *Local Development Plan Supplementary Guidance*. Available at:

[http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans\\_policies/SGPolicies.pdf](http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans_policies/SGPolicies.pdf)

ACPO Crime Prevention Initiatives Limited, *Secure by Design*. Available at:

<http://www.securedbydesign.com/>

Communities and Local Government, 2008, *Designing Gypsy and Traveller sites – Good Practice Guide*. London. Available at:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/11439/designinggypsiesites.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/11439/designinggypsiesites.pdf)

Department for Social Development, 2013, *Draft Design Guide for Travellers' Sites in Northern Ireland*. Northern Ireland. Available at:

<http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/travellers-design-guide-consultation.pdf>

Scottish Government, 2006, *PAN77 - Designing Safer Places*. Edinburgh. Available at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/95658/0023159.pdf>

Scottish Government, 2010, *Ethnic Status*. Available at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/gypsiestravellers/ethnic>